

A CHALLENGE AND WAR-CHARGE NO. 2929

A SERMON
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*“O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?
The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,
for so much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
1 Corinthians 15:55-58*

THERE is little fear that the minister of this flock should forget that man is mortal. Where men are massed in such numbers, we not only believe in mortality, we see it. We hear the funeral knell like the striking of the clock—habitually. The mower has always work in this pasture—every week the great gleaner has some ears of corn to gather in this harvest field, and every time we assemble in this house we have to remember that some who were with us when we met before have crossed the flood and entered into their rest. We cannot forget this.

But my dear friends, there is a danger lest *you* should forget it. Not being able to take a glimpse over so large a company as this, if your children have been spared to you, if your house has been unvisited by death for this last nineteen or twenty years, you may be apt to think that you have immunity given to you—that you will never come to the grave—that death may arrest others, but that you sit alone in some privileged security and shall see no sorrow, that the arrows may fly and strike on the right hand and on the left, but that you walk invulnerable amongst the dead.

It is well, therefore, in order to cool the hot blood of our youth and to stir the dull blood of our old age, that we should oftentimes make a journey to the tomb and reflect on death, judgment, resurrection, and eternity. In these busy times, when men have so much to do in order to live, it may be of much service to them to think how certainly they must die. 'Tis greatly wise to talk about our last hours. The shroud, the grave, the mattock, may teach us more of true wisdom than all the learned heads that ever pondered vain philosophy, or all the lips that ever uttered earth-born science.

Now, I intend tonight, as God the Holy Ghost shall enable me, to address my text first to believers in Christ and then briefly to warn those who are as yet not included in that happy number. I must leave your conscience to judge to which class you belong. I fondly hope that no one will be so perverse as to take encouragement that does not belong to him, but that every man will be wise enough and honest enough to his own heart to take just that truth which fits his own case, and lay it home to his conscience and to his heart.

I. First of all, THE MESSAGE TO BELIEVERS.

We take this text, not with the hope of exploring it, but with the thought of skimming the surface with the swallow, rather than diving into its depths like leviathan.

There are three things on the surface—A brief but unparalleled challenge given to two dreadful and invincible foes—“O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” A glorious paean of splendid triumph—“Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory,” and a war charge addressed by a great commander to his soldiers—“Brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

There is here, first, *a double challenge*, “O Death, where is thy sting?” Death, you skeleton monarch, where is thy sting? Fleshless rider upon the pale horse, we ask you, where is thy sting? With a horrible and ghastly smile, he answers us, “My sting! You have but to open your eyes and see it, and ere long I shall make your flesh quiver with it, when I send it in even to your very soul. Where is my sting! Is it no sting to you to know that you must leave everything you call dear on the earth, that your estates must be left behind you, and your broad acres must be all renounced? Is it nothing to you that your houses and your lands, your merriments and your enjoyments, your feasts and your riots, must be forsaken? That the hearth and everything that is genial in the family, friendship and the communion of generous hearts, and everything that makes glad the eye or cheers the ear must be left behind you? For your eye, when filmed by my finger—no more the landscape, the rugged mountain, or the plain? For your ear, when I have sealed them in eternal silence—no more the voice of them that make merry, no more the music or the choral hymn? You shall be deaf forever when I cast you into the grave. Is it no sting to you to leave the enjoyments of the house of God? For you no more the communion of the body and blood of Christ, for you no more the gladsome seasons when the tribes come up to the house of the Lord with willing footsteps to keep holy-day and magnify Him who has loved them and given Himself for them. Is it no sting to remember that soon you must gaze, for the last time, upon the cheek which is now so fair in your sight? That soon you must take the last fond gaze of her who is the partner of your life, that you must leave everything, taking nothing with you, returning to the earth naked as you came from your mother’s womb, stripped, bereft of everything, a penniless beggar, going back to the vile dust from whence you did spring—is there no sting in this?”

“Where is my sting? Ask the grey-headed,” the monster says, “whether they already do not feel the pangs of it. Their eyes grow weak, the strong pillars of the house of man begins to fail, the breath comes heavily, the hair is blanched—the grasshopper has become a burden and the teeth cease because they are few. Ask me where is my sting? Even the young can feel it, for, if they think at all, they know that every breath they draw is but a step towards the tomb, and that their pulses,

*‘Like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.’”*

“Where is my sting!” says Death. “Look to the widow in whose heart my sting is rankling now. The beloved of her soul has departed and she is left to mourn like a turtle without her mate. Ask the fatherless where is the sting of death as they are driven into the street, received by the cold hand of public charity, scarce housed and fed. Where is my sting! Ask the weeping child as he looks down into the coffin upon the dead face of the mother that once toiled and labored for him, who once cherished and loved him, but who has now gone to the place appointed for all living. Aha! Aha!” says he, “where is my sting! You have all felt it in the departure of your best beloved ones, when you most wished to have them. The State has felt it. I smote the fellow to the crowned head and laid him low. I smote again and took away the statesman when he had returned from a distant empire laden with the spoils of many years’ experience. I have with my sting taken away the rich and the mighty, the beautiful and the lovely, the learned, the pious, the good, the benevolent. I have taken them away just when the world wanted them the most, till I made good men say, ‘The righteous perish and the godly man ceaseth from the earth.’ Ask me where is my sting!” he cries, and drives his white horse of terror onward and dashes from us in disdain.

Ay, Death! but we defy you still, and though you have thus vented your spleen, we cry to you again, “Have at you, Death! Have at you! You have no sting, for all your boast. To believers you are now a stingless-locust. Hold awhile till we hear the other tyrant, your powerful confederate.”

“O Grave, where is thy victory?” From its hollow depths, the Grave replies, “Ask me where is my victory! Wherefore, O foolish son of Adam, do you not ask where is *not* my victory? From Machpelah to Gethsemane I have had my splendid triumphs. Onward, from the first age even until now, I have

proved to men that I am victor. Where are my triumphs! Open the soil upon which your fair world rests and see if every vault be not filled with a putrid mass of rotten mortality. Could you bring up your fellows from the grave and pile them above the sod, there would be so many dead that there would not be room for the living. Yes, heap them up, heap them up till they make a pyramid higher than the Egyptian Pharaoh ever reared—pile them up and they will outreach the Alps and salute the morning star with their dread heights of rottenness!

“Where is my victory? Ask every howling tempest as it drives the ship like a cockleshell before it, ask every sunken rock and reef and icebound shore. Where is my victory! Ask the battlefield of yesterday, all gory with blood shed by a brother’s hand, where sons of Anglo-Saxon mothers lie upon the plains of their own country, slain by their own brothers’ hand! Where is my victory! From Waterloo go back to Trafalgar—stretch your wings and fly to ancient times, to Salamis and Marathon, or farther back still—speak of all that Sennacherib did, and the mighty host that went before him, when he smote the loins of kings and slew hecatombs of their subjects in an hour.

“Where is my victory! There is not a spot of ground but feels it, there is not an age but must testify thereunto. The signs of it are everywhere. Look at yonder lovely nook, where birds are singing and sweet flowers are springing up from the ever-green sod. You will say, ‘Death hath never been here.’ But what are those hillocks bound with the brown bramble? *I have* been here and here keep I my place. Look yonder where the white stones stand up like the very teeth of death, and see how I have devoured my thousands. From yonder busy city they bring them out by scores each day and lay them in the tomb—and yet you ask me where is my victory! Why, you are every one of you captives of my perpetual triumphing. You are marching on, every one of you, downwards to my jaws. Go whither you may, you are always coming down to my doors, I shall soon shut my gates upon you, every one of you. Strong and healthy men, men of brawny arm, men of massive intellect, men whose limbs totter not though you bear mighty burdens, I shall one of these days receive you, helpless as little children—and you shall lie in your white cerements, in your wooden case—and I shall then prove to you and to the world where is my victory.”

Even as we tremblingly listen, the Grave shuts its yawning mouth and all is still save where the voice of faith, looking down upon the dry bones and believing that they shall yet live, cries, “Despite your vaunt, you braggart, your boastings are as hollow as yourself. Where is thy victory? We will prove you impotent yet, O desperate Grave! You have no triumphs. Our Lord, JEHOVAH’S Christ, the Resurrection—He has broken open your portals and made through your territories a passage wide for all believers to the Land of Promise. What though—

*‘An angel’s arm can’t snatch me from the grave,
Legions of angels can’t confine me there.’”*

Turn now, O believer, and sing a paean of triumph. “The sting of death is sin.” Through Jesus Christ that is forgiven. “The strength of sin is the law.” Through Christ Jesus that has ceased to thunder, for it has been fulfilled and has become our friend. Therefore “thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Prepare ye then the voice of joyous thanksgiving. Make ready your triumphal hymn. Death, we now triumph over you. You have spoken, but now we will speak and answer you to your face. Death has no sting to a believer. Once death was the penalty of sin—sin being forgiven, the penalty ceases and Christians do not die now as a punishment for their sin, but they die that they may be prepared to live. They are unclothed that they may be clothed upon with that house which is from heaven. They leave the tenement of clay that they may inherit the eternal mansion.

There is no sting left in you, O Death, in yourself. As for all you can tell us of aches and pains and groans, we know that all these things work together for our good. As for what you tell us of your gloom

and of your horror, we believe in nothing that you say, for, if Christ is with us, we will walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.

As you have lost your sting in yourself, O Death, so you have also lost your sting as to all that we lose by you. You tell us that we lose the sights of earth, but skeleton king, we gain the sights of heaven. What are the landscapes of this dusky world compared with the azure skies, the lakes of crystal, and the plains of everlasting green in the land of light and glory?

What are the cities of this world—the giant cities of the West, the fairy cities of the East—what are they all compared with Jerusalem, the golden city, the pearly-gated, the city whose walls are jasper, whose very paving stones are laid with fair colors? Lose by losing earth! Surely in gaining heaven the loss is all forgotten!

You say our ears are closed—it is not so—they are opened to hear the seraph's hymn and to listen to the music of the cherubim, awful, sublime, and beautiful. You say we leave behind us wealth and wit and friends. Fool that you are, 'tis wealth we gain—and all is dross we leave behind. And as for friends, we have as many—yes, and many more—and they are better too than those we leave on earth. We have beloved ones that have crossed the flood, and at their head we have One who is better to us than a million friends, the Chief among Ten Thousand, the Altogether Lovely. As for all that you can take away, take it, and welcome, since the joy which shall be revealed in us is an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This far surpasses the light affliction of losing all that earth can give.

Death, we tell you again that your sting is taken away as to the friends we have lost. The widow, weeping, tells you that she does not feel your sting, for her husband is in heaven and she is following him as speedily as time can carry her. The mother tells you, Death, that through *divine* grace you have no sting in her thoughts concerning her infants. She rejoices to know that at her breast there once did hang immortal spirits that now behold the Savior's face. And we say to you, Death, concerning all beloved ones who have gone, that we sorrow not over them, and would not—

*“Break their placid sleep,
Nor lure them from their home above.”*

We devoutly thank the Father of spirits, who has safely housed them beyond fear of damage and brought them to the desired haven where no rough wind or tempestuous wave shall ever rock their keel again. “Blessed,” we say, as we repeat the voice from heaven, “blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.” And that voice from heaven responds again, in tones articulate, “Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

*“Thus brighter hopes, that are not dreams,
Their light around the spirit shed;
And heaven itself breaks out in gleams
Of glory round the dying bed.”*

Death, you have no sting—your pains are loosed. So what your face be pale, your shadow dark, as you flit across the chamber! What though frail nature shrink and shudder at your dart? Kind Jesus, help us—we cling to You and all our spirit bravely cries, in calm defiance, lively faith, and holy rapture—“O Death, where is thy sting? Thanks be unto God that giveth us the victory.”

As for the grave, dear brothers and sisters, let us answer its foul-mouthed boastings. We tell the grave that it has no victory in itself. 'Tis true we shall sleep in it, but we sleep as victors. We hear the shout of triumph and we lie down as warriors taking their rest, not as vanquished ones. Christ has made the tomb, which was once a prison, a resting place for the bodies of His saints. He has made the tomb His royal closet, where he bids His beloved lay aside the dusky garments of their work-days till they shall be cleansed and made meet to be the garments of His everlasting holy-days in heaven.

O Grave, when you do encompass our bodies, you are yourself defeated—you are our servant—call us not your slaves. We conquer ere we come to nestle in your bosom. O, Grave, we have lost nothing but the like of that we committed to your keeping when we placed the slumbering forms of friends we dearly loved to lodge within your arms. Their relics are there, but *they* are in heaven. Their corruption is there, but the earnest of their resurrection is on high and that which lives in deathless immortality is above.

There they lie, for flesh and blood have sin—there let them lie, for flesh and blood must be purified. But they shall live and we tell you, Grave, that when the trumpet sounds, you must give back our friends to us, ten times more dear than they were when, with hollow sound of, “Dust to dust and ashes to ashes,” we laid them in your cold embrace. You have no victory, ’tis but a temporary triumph—you must give back your prey.

Talk you of corruption—what is it but as the fuller’s bath wherein the body lies till it be made of purest white? Speak you of cold vaults, darkness, and damp—what are all these but fit accompaniments of the process in which the corruption shall become incorruption and the mortal immortality? We smile at all your horrors, we salute you as the place where we shall take repose awhile than as the dungeon of our souls’ imprisonment. O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?

I wish I could set these matters tonight in language such as Christmas Evans would have used in his glowing moments. This is a right glowing theme that might make a dumb man speak and might summon the ears of the deaf to listen. Christ has vanquished death by dying. He has disrobed the grave of its triumphal garments by wearing its cerements Himself. He consecrated the sepulcher by slumbering in its dark recess.

Death is the destroying angel now no more, the tomb no more a charnel house. Behold, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza to the top of Hebron—doors, posts, bars, and all—so has Christ carried the gates of death to the top of heaven’s hill—posts, and bars, and all—and all the legions of hell cannot bring back the trophies which our Samson has rent away.

Bound Himself once with cords by His own brethren, He snapped them as though they were green withs and in heaps upon heaps He has laid His enemies dead at His feet. Sin, and death, and hell—all are vanquished by the Man that once was bound, but who now binds captivity and leads it captive. Sing unto Him, you spirits that are redeemed before the throne of God.

Lift up your hallelujahs, clap your wings, sweep your harps and say, “All hail! You vanquisher of death, You destroyer of the grave!” Let the echo reverberate to the lowest depths of hell, and let the fiends bite their fire-tormented tongues and gnash their teeth in vain, whilst that song is echoed in notes like these, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?”

Hark now! Oh, hark! Heed *the war charge of our Great Captain*. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Alas for the embattled hosts of God’s elect, if you, O Death! didst seal the dispatch from the gory field of battle, and you, O Grave! didst hollow out the niche where the warrior should receive in holy sanctuary his honorable due! “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

’Twere a troublous and a toilsome thing, in truth, to be steadfast if there were no reward. Christian men and women, to you is this word of admonition given. Inasmuch as you shall not die but live, inasmuch as you are the heirs of immortality and life, Christ bids you this day be steadfast. Be steadfast in your doctrine. Hold the truth and especially the solemn truth of resurrection. Hold it firmly, as with an iron grip.

Be you steadfast in holiness—let nothing move you—stand to the right. Remember, if the earth reels, your hand is on the stars and therefore you need not lose your hold. Be you steadfast in your profession—blush not, hide not your candle under a bushel. The glory that is to be revealed will make you good amends for all the shame and contumely that the reproach of Christ may bring upon you. Be you steadfast in everything that is a matter of faith to you—steadfast in your firm belief of Christ’s redemption of your souls—steadfast in the full conviction that you are the adopted children of your

heavenly Father—steadfast in your continual perseverance in sanctification, that you may be fitted for the embrace of your Lord. Be you steadfast like mountains that never move, like the hidden pillars of granite on which, though eye has never seen, this large globe rests. Like those under-lying rocks which bear up all the deep soil, be you everlastingly steadfast.

Temptation will come—“be ye unmovable.” Like cedars rocked in the storm, but never uprooted—like lighthouses against which the huge waves dash and over which the mountains of foam will leap, be you bright in testimony but never stirred in steadfastness. Like some peak that glitters in the sun and soon is shivered in the lightning, yet still stands looking up to the next storm and defying the next blow.

“Be ye unmovable.” As the anvil to the stroke of the hammer, so bear you persecution, affliction, temptation—let none of these things move you, neither count your life dear unto you. Immortality! Be that your watchword, as you stand in your ranks while the shot is flying and the foe is advancing. When you are bidden not to advance, but to stand still—“having done all to stand”—be this your reflection, “your life is hid with Christ in God.” Immortality shall make amends for all your pain and suffering here. Resurrection shall restore all you seem to lose in the fray.

Be you “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Be you working here and there, at home and abroad—in the morning, when the first ruddy streak paints the brow of the young dawn—at noon-day, when the hot sun pours out its lavish floods of light, at eventide, when the birds are going to their rest, and at midnight, if there be a fallen sister who at no other hour can be reached.

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand.” With a heart for any strife, be first and foremost in every conflict—dash in at every skirmish and be in your rank at every decisive struggle. Hide not your face from shame and spitting, turn not back from labor or from scorn—“in the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread” on earth, but that bread which you eat in heaven, so gloriously won by the grace of God, shall be all the sweeter for the sweat that was lavished upon it. “Always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

But I hear some of you say, “To what end is all this strain?” “Ah!” says one young man, “I have been steadfast and unmovable, and I have lost my job. Instead of being prospered by it, I have suffered loss.” Well, there is another and a better land—your wrongs shall be righted there. Think of the rest which remains for the people of God.

“Ah!” says a mother, “but I trained up my little child and she just began to gladden my heart with her first prayer—and then she died.” Refrain your eyes from weeping, for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord—she lives a better life than she could have lived with you.

I, too, may ask, “To what end?” I may say that I see many brought to Christ and what becomes of them?—they die. In the college, out of our small numbers, two men we trained for the ministry have fallen asleep in Christ—one while yet a student and the other when he had but departed from us a few months. Well, but what of all this? They live. We trained them for the skies and made them choristers for eternity.

Our work is not lost. We must be steadfast, always abounding in God’s work while here. It seems to me that this is the end for which the Sunday school teacher, the mother, the father, the minister should always be working. What does the farmer look for? Is he content when he sees his corn turning yellow to say, “How straight it stands! What a good harvest there is!”

No, no, he never counts what he has in his harvest till they shout the “Harvest Home.” So we should think our work is never rewarded to the full till souls, saved through our means, get to heaven and until we get there to meet them there.

I see some dear brothers here who I have no doubt look for many souls to meet them at the gates of Paradise—and I can cast my eye over a sister, here and there in this church who, highly honored of God, will have young spirits to meet them at heaven’s gate and salute them joyfully as mothers in Israel. Happy, happy we who, when we wing our way to heaven, shall hear a band behind us—and when we turn our heads, wondering who they are, shall hear each say, “You did bring me to Christ. You did teach me His blessed name. You did rescue me from sin and vice. You have led me along the golden shining

path to heaven, and here I am, to share your bliss forever.” Brethren, there is another and a better land”—therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

II. We will pause a minute and then use our text for a very short time indeed for the other part of the congregation, uttering A WARNING TO UNBELIEVERS.

Where are they? Where shall I point my finger? Whither shall I present my gaze? They are mingled everywhere—in almost every pew. In these aisles and in the pews we have men and woman who do not love Christ, who have not passed from death unto life. Strangers, ay, and those that hear us every Sabbath-day too, to our pain and grief are here—hundreds, hundreds, hundreds that are still enemies to God and in the gall of bitterness.

Hear me, then, hear me! *To you death has a sting.* It will sting you in death. It will plague you on your pillow. It will make you toss your aching head. It will make your heart palpitate with a huge unutterable dread. You shall feel the sting and your friends shall see that you feel it by those dread expressions of awful gloom which shall come over you on the bed of death.

And there will be a sting after death, a sting the moment you are dead. Summoned before your God, you shall hear your sentence and there will be a sting in judgment. When the body shall rise from the grave, then there will be a sting forever and forever, in the second death—forever and forever. Is there any man here who can measure eternity? Who can tell its everlasting years? Yet all the while there shall be a sting in death, and such a sting, and such a terror, and such a misery, and such a torment, as only they can know who have begun to feel it—and even they know it not, for still it is forever and forever, when twice ten thousand thousand years have gone—forever and forever still!

There *is* a sting in Death *to you* and *over you the Grave will get the victory*, for the Grave shall devour you. When you wake up from it, again, it shall not be to newness of life—it shall not be in the image of the second Adam, but in the image of the first—and perhaps in the image of the first Adam in all the decay and loathsomeness into which death brought him.

I know not in what form the wicked dead shall rise. It may be they shall even in their bodies be the objects of everlasting contempt, devoured by the worm that never dies, so that their very flesh will give evidence of it. O my hearers, if these things be true, it is time that we woke up, it is time that saints woke up to try and bring you to Christ. It is high time that you also awoke up out of slumber. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” “for our God is a consuming fire.”

Are you ready to meet God? Are you ready for the judgment? Can you confront the Judge? Who among you can dwell with everlasting burnings or abide with the devouring flames? Do you shudder? Do you say, “Great God save us from our sin”?

The path is easy. The path is open—God wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn unto Him and live. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Trust Jesus now and you are saved at once. Death has lost its sting in that moment and the Grave its victory.

We said this morning in our simple discourse, “Repent and believe the Gospel.” This is the sum of the Gospel—to repent and to know Christ. Oh, that the Spirit of God may lead every one in this assembly to do so at this very hour and then you can walk over your graves without fear, and descend into them without dread, for you shall come up out of them with triumph, you shall ascend to heaven with glory, and so shall you be forever with the Lord. The Lord add His own blessing for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

2 THESSALONIANS 3

Verse 1. *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:*

A most important request. What can the ministers of the Gospel do if their people cease to pray for them? Even if their own prayers be heard, as they will be, and a measure of blessing be given, yet it will be but a scant measure compared with what it would be if all the saints united in their intercessions. Whenever we see the Word of God very mighty in one place it ought to encourage us to pray that it may be the same in another place, for it is the same Word and the hearts of all men are alike. The same spirit can give the same blessing in every place.

Hence Paul says, “Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.” Now, if any of you in your church are enjoying rich prosperity, pray for others, that they may have the same. And if you are without it, take courage from any church which you see prospering and ask the Lord to do the same things for you. Very likely if we prayed more for ministers, they would be more blessed to us. There is many a man who cannot “hear” his minister and the reason may be that God never hears him pray for his minister.

2. *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.*

I really do not know which is the worst to put up with—an unreasonable man or a wicked man. A wicked man may do you all sorts of mischief, but you soon know him. But an unreasonable man—you do not know where to find him and he can attack you from all sorts of places. Alas! there are some very unreasonable Christians—very good in some points, but very stupid—and a stupid man may set a village on a blaze quite as easily as a wicked man. The stupid man’s accident may be as dangerous as another man’s design. Pray also “that we may be delivered from wicked and unreasonable men, for all men have not faith,” and all men have not sense, I may also add.

3. *But the Lord is faithful,*

There is the mercy. Whether men are fools or knaves, the Lord is faithful.

3. *Who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.*

We are taught to pray for this grace. We are here told that we shall have it. Since God is faithful He will keep us from evil.

4. *And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.*

Our obedience to apostolic ordinances should be of the present and of the future. It should be fixed in our souls. What the Lord has commanded in His church by His apostles should be carefully regarded by us.

5. *And the Lord direct your heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.*

The two things go together. When we love God, we long for the glory and the appearing of His Son. The most loving spirits in the world have had most an eye to that glorious coming. Note Enoch who walked with God and prophesied, saying, “Behold, the LORD cometh.” Note Daniel, “a man greatly beloved,” and a seer who looked into the future and saw the Ancient of Days.

Mark also John who leaned his head on Jesus’ bosom—we may say of him that he spoke more of the second coming than all the rest of the apostles. When the heart gets right away from earth and is set upon God, then it is that we begin to long for the manifestation of the Lord from heaven.

6. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.*

Paul had been to Thessalonica and had given oral teaching, and now he commits to the book what he had spoken, but he bids them take care not to associate with those who willfully broke the ordinances of the church which he had taught them. There are some brethren with whom it is ill for us to associate, lest they do us harm—and it is ill for them that we associate with them, lest we seem to assist them in their evil deeds.

Especially is this so in the case of brethren of the class that he is about to describe—mischief makers, troublers, people that can always tell you the gossip of a congregation, that can tear a neighbor’s character to pieces, that are able to perceive spots on the sun—people who delight in parading the fault

of God's own children and are never so happy as when they are making others unhappy by what they have to say. These are the kind of people to whom you should give a wide berth.

7-9. *For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.*

The apostle had a right to be supported by those among whom he labored. He always insists upon that right, but for their good, knowing the tendency of that age, he abjured that right—and he is indignant that there should be others who did nothing whatever as to Christian ministry, but who availed themselves of the charity of the church at Thessalonica so as to be able to live upon it without work.

10. *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

A very capital rule, indeed. There are some so very spiritually minded that to soil their hands is also to soil their conscience. They are afraid of hard work. They think it is unspiritual, whereas there is nothing in the world, next to the grace of God, that is more likely to keep men out of mischief than having plenty to do.

11. *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

Not doing their own business and therefore putting their noses into everybody else's business. If they had minded their own affairs, they would have left other people alone. There are such people alive now. We must not be surprised if we meet them seeing that they were alive in the apostle's days—if they troubled him it must be small marvel if they trouble us.

12. *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

The best bread and the sweetest is our own. We are to work for it. We are to work with quietness. I suppose to some that is very hard work, but they must labor after it, for quietness is a Christian grace—it is indeed a high Christian attainment.

13-15. *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

This kind of Christian discipline ought to be carried out still, in reference not only to this one case of busybodies, but to all other cases. When a church grows large, there can be no efficient discipline from one man, or from all his officers with him. There must be the discipline of the whole church towards itself—each Christian, according to his measure of grace, seeking the good of the whole—for while every man must bear his own burden, yet is it said, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “Look not every man upon his own things, but also upon the things of others.” The careful desire to promote the Christian welfare of all our fellow members is a very different thing from being busybodies. We must have equal desire not in any way to interfere where we should not.

16. *Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.*

What a sweet benediction. And how he heaps the words together, as if peace was one of the greatest blessings a church could have. Indeed, dear brethren, it is the essential to all other blessings. I am quite certain that we never should have enjoyed the long years of perpetual prosperity here which we have had if it had not pleased the Lord to keep us always in peace. So may we be for many and many a year to come! May no root of bitterness ever spring up to trouble us, but may this text be fulfilled—“Now the Lord of peace give you peace always by all means.”

16-17. *The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.*

I suppose he always wrote a part of each epistle. Probably through the failure of his eyesight, he was unable to write the whole of it with his own hands, but employed some one of his brethren to be his

amanuensis. But in order that everyone might know the epistle to be genuine, there was always a little of Paul's writing, sometimes in big text-hand, as when he said to one church, "You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand."

18. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

So with great courtesy and a comprehensive prayer he finishes his letter.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.